DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 743 RC 018 567

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TITLE Reduction in Force in Rural Eastern Kentucky.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (Tuscaloosa, AL, August 13-18, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Declining Enrollment; Economic Impact; *Educational Economics; Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Politics of Education; *Reduction in Force; *Rural Schools; School Districts; State Departments of Education; *State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky

ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors related to the reduction of certified school personnel in Eastern Kentucky rural school districts. The economy of Eastern Kentucky has relied heavily on the coal industry, which during the past several years has suffered losses resulting in job layoffs and closure of companies. Economic distress caused a declining school enrollment. Declining enrollment indicates a need to restructure the number of schools in a district and to assess the need for personnel required for that district. Political activity and the election of new members to boards of education created new demands to generate more positions. The Educational Improvement Act, better known as the "academic bankruptcy act", allows the State Department of Education to intervene in the operation of a local school district and to limit the authority of the local superintendent and local board of education. Under this law, the state is able to take action in several areas including overseeing expenditures and employment or dismissal of personnel. Four school districts in Eastern Kentucky (Knott, Martin, Pike and Floyd counties) were analyzed concerning the reduction of personnel. It was found that although many of the problems in reducing personnel were associated with political pressures and favoritism, the primary reason was related to the fact that the school districts were the major sources of jobs in the region. Political favoritism must be eliminated and responsible operation of the schools must exist. Additional control may be taken by the state as evidenced by the recent decision of the Kentucky Supreme Court that ruled the operation and financing of schools in Kentucky is unconstitutional. (LP)

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REDUCTION IN FORCE IN RURAL EASTERN KENTUCKY

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A paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the **National Council of Professors of Educational Administration** in Tuscaloosa, AL., August 13-18, 1989.

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RC 018567

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REDUCTION IN FORCE IN RURAL EASTERN KENTUCKY

Rural school districts in Eastern Kentucky have been impacted by economics, politics, and enforced state regulations and policies. These facets have created political turmoil and financial difficulty which have mandated a call for a reduction in force of certified and classified personnel in several of the school districts. The impact of reducing personnel has generated new concerns from educators, citizens, school board members, and the Kentucky State Department of Education. To clarify the situations which have developed several factors must be considered:

1) changes in the economic environments of Eastern Kentucky--declining enrollment; 2) political change [school board members]; 3) Educational Improvement Act [academic bankruptcy]. **Change** has become a key term in the school districts in Kentucky and has made a major impact in school districts in Eastern Kentucky relating to the reduction in force of personnel.

BACKGROUND

The economy of Eastern Kentucky is dominated by the coal industry. During the last two years, the coal industry has suffered dynamic losses with many layoffs of personnel involved in the industry. In addition many coal companies have closed their operations in Eastern Kentucky some from financial losses others because of union activities and demands. The second major economic factor of Eastern Kentucky is education [school

districts and their operations are considered to be the major factor for jobs]. The number of students in schools has declined due to the number of people who have moved because of the loss of jobs in the coal industry and due to smaller families and a decline in the number of births. The declining enrollment indicates a need to restructure the number of schools in a district and to assess the need for personnel required for the operation of the school district.

Political activity and the election of new members to the boards of education have also created new demands on positions available for individuals in the school districts and the operation of the schools. The boards of education which have had major changes in the composition of the boards have in several instances made changes in personnel, especially in superintendents. The demands from the boards of education have been to generate more positions--certified and classified--than are need or required for the operation of the school district.

A major impact has been the Educational Improvement Act (1984--KRS 158.650-158.750) better known as "**academic bankruptcy**". The "academic bankruptcy act" allows the Kentucky State Department of Education by recommendation of the state superintendent of instruction and concurrence of the state board for elementary and secondary education to intervene in the operation of a local school district and to limit the authority of the local superintendent and local board of education. Basically the state may take action in the following areas:

(1) expenditure of funds; (2) employment and dismissal of personnel; (3) establishment and modification of the school calendar; (4) instructional program and policies; (5) student code of conduct; (6) other areas as may be designated by state board for elementary and secondary education administrative regulation (**KENTUCKY SCHOOL LAWS 1988**, 209). The primary concerns related to state action are student attendance percentages, dropout rate of students, financial status [may not operate in deficit], performance of students on state mandated examination [achievement tests], general effective operation of the school district. When a district becomes educationally deficient, the state is to take action to eliminate the deficiency and uses the **"Management Assistance Program"** (**KRS 158.780**) to assist the school district. This program is directed to school districts with critical management deficiencies as determined by the state department of education especially those with personnel and financial problems. The **Educational Improvement Act** has four phases: (1) warning to the district of deficiencies and recommendations for correction; (2) implementation of the Management Assistance Program; (3) assignment to the district a designee of the state superintendent of public instruction who must approve actions by the local board of education and school superintendent [basically the designee controls the finances and employment of personnel]; (4) takeover of the school district by the state and the removal of the local board of education members and the local school superintendent.

The Kentucky State Department of Education may also mandate curriculum audits or assessments of the schools regarding the quality of the curriculum and controls concerning the quality. Major emphases are on the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum (Hoyle, English, & Steffy: 1985, 90). The curriculum assessment team from the state department use three major sources of information: documents, interviews, and site visitations.

REDUCTION IN FORCE

The background information lends support to the rationale for reducing the number of personnel in the rural school districts of Eastern Kentucky. Reduction in force is becoming a reality in several of the school districts because of the economy, politics, and state department mandates. Bridgman (1987) indicated that some problems regarding school districts is the proliferation of school administrators and the shift of expenditures from instruction to administrative costs. It is necessary to consider the fact that there are more administrative positions but there are also more special programs and projects in the schools which require administrative personnel. The problem in Eastern Kentucky's rural schools is not the shift of personnel to administration but the shift of personnel toward "non-classroom instructional personnel. This facet is supported by Bridgman (1987).

For clarification, four (4) school districts in Eastern Kentucky were analyzed concerning reduction in force of

personnel. The districts have all experienced impact from the economy, politics, and the state department. Knott County Schools, Martin County Schools, Pike County Schools, and Floyd County Schools were involved in the study. Telephone interviews, on-site visits, review of state department data were analyzed.

KNOTT COUNTY SCHOOLS

The coal industry has impacted Knott County Schools economically and has generated declining enrollment and a decrease in the average daily attendance of students. Currently the Kentucky State Department of Education has not recommended any cuts in personnel. For the 1989-1990 academic year the school district plans to have the same number of personnel, both certified and classified.

MARTIN COUNTY SCHOOLS

Martin County Schools has had several major facets impacting the number of personnel and the education programs. The shutdown of two major coal companies has caused major decline in enrollment which is related to the state departments recommendation of major cuts in personnel. The local board of education made only limited cuts--not as many as recommended by the state department--eliminating six (6) certified teacher positions and six (6) classified positions [teacher aids and custodians]. Politics at the local school board level has been the major facet impacting the educational components of Martin County. Since 1982, five (5) individuals have served as superintendent of schools. Political controversy has been the

primary cause of the change in the leadership of the school district. Elections of the members of the local board of education and new composition or board makeup has resulted in superintendents being removed for failure to work with or in cooperation with the school board. The major impact has been the hiring of new classified personnel as political favors even when the positions were not required for effective operation of the schools. More important was the dismissal of some classified personnel and certified personnel. A few of the cuts or reductions were by retirement, others by resignations. The dilemma for the district has been low morale of personnel and the question "Who is in charge today?"

PIKE COUNTY SCHOOLS

The Kentucky State Department of Education has appointed a designee of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to work to improve the financial conditions of Pike County because of a financial deficit of over one million dollars for 1988-1989. In order to eliminate the financial deficit the Pike County Board of Education was recommended to take action to reduce, reassign and transfer some members of the existing staff. The state recommended that reduction in force reduce the number of classroom teachers by a minimum of forty (40), of principals/assistant principals by eight (8), and to eliminate twenty-eight (28) custodial employees. A multitude of other cuts and reductions were also recommended for the 1989-1990 school year. Action was taken to reduce the number of personnel but

failure of the school board to follow procedure and policies brought litigation from the principals. This action prevented the reduction in force of the principals. Declining enrollment in the district indicates a loss of fifteen (15) classroom units. Recent action has seen the resignation of the superintendent of schools and the appointment of a new superintendent.

FLOYD COUNTY SCHOOLS

Floyd County Schools is now in phase three (3) of the "academic bankruptcy" due to financial conditions, problems in curriculum, and declining enrollment. Political controversy has been one of the problems in Floyd County with a change in superintendents. The economy of the district has created a financial deficit and declining enrollment has added to the problem. A curriculum audit indicated major problems in the curriculum and effectiveness of the school district. The Kentucky State Department of Education has appointed a designee for the State Superintendent of Instruction to control the district. Based on the financial deficit, Floyd County Schools were recommended to reduce administrative staff by three (3), reduce teachers by a minimum of ten (10), reduce custodians by at least twenty-one (21) and other classified positions by a minimum of forty (40). Recommendations for other budget cuts and adjustments were also made. The local school superintendent has made recommendations to the Floyd County School Board to make these adjustments, but on several actions the school board members have not followed the recommendations and made the

necessary reduction in force of personnel because of political pressures.

SUMMARY

Many of the problems related to reduction in force of personnel of rural Eastern Kentucky schools are related to political actions, but primarily to the fact that the school districts are the major economic source of jobs in the region. Political favoritism must be eliminated and a more responsible operation of the schools must exist. Glass (1988) recommends that school boards and administration take several steps in cutting personnel costs. Data from the Kentucky State Department of Education indicate that rural school districts of Eastern Kentucky will continue to experience declining enrollment which will result in a decrease of personnel and funds for the operation of the schools. Other districts in Eastern Kentucky are experiencing similar problems resulting in a reduction in force. Unless the administrators and school boards of the districts take a proactive practice to change the environment and operation of the school districts additional control may be taken by the state and reduction in force will become a part of the annual activities. A recent fact that may impact the rural school districts of Eastern Kentucky even more is the Kentucky Supreme Court decision that the operation and financing of schools in Kentucky is unconstitutional. The decision mandated that the Kentucky General Assembly [legislature] take action by April, 1990, to develop legislation to correct all facets of

providing a free education for the children of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Currently, a commission of twenty-one (21) are studying the future of education in Kentucky. The Kentucky Supreme Court decision came from action taken by sixty-six (66) school districts, mostly from Eastern Kentucky, that the districts were not receiving equitable funding for education and therefore could not provide an effective curriculum.

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